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## Coming Soon: Scholar of Religion Joins UB Law Faculty, but Not Quite Yet

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# COMING SOON

*Scholar of religion joins UB Law faculty, but not quite yet*

Sometimes good things come in twos. That has proved to be the case for UB Law School's newest faculty member, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, a scholar of religion and public life. No sooner had she been offered the Buffalo teaching position than the news came that she had won a spot in the prestigious National Humanities Center fellowship program in North Carolina. As a result, while she has joined the UB Law faculty, she is spending the 2006-07 academic year in Research Triangle Park, N.C., doing research and working on two books.

Sullivan, a Chicago native, most recently has held teaching and administrative positions at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where she earned a doctoral degree. Her J.D. is from the University of Chicago Law School.

"I think of myself as somebody who studies the intersection of religion and law," she says. "I am not trained as a theologian. I am trained in the comparative study of religion. What I think of myself doing is looking at the way judges and lawyers talk about religion."

Sullivan's most recent book is *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 2005). "There is a very real sense in which religious freedom is turning out to be impossible to realize, even in the United States," she writes in the foreword to that book, which is built around a trial

over whether a Florida cemetery could legally remove religious-themed memorial arrangements that families had placed on their loved ones' graves in defiance of local cemetery regulations.

"Religion and law today speak in languages largely opaque to each other," she also writes, and Sullivan's work seeks to bridge that gap – a vital task in a time of growing religious pluralism in the United States and worldwide. "This is quite an important time in terms of

thinking through the legal regulation of religion in the modern world," she says.

"There is a certain intensity because of the visibility of religion in public life right now," Sullivan says, citing such public policy debates as abortion, homosexuality, cloning, euthanasia and public funding of faith-based initiatives. But, she notes, the tension between religion and public policy is not new to our time: "There have always been such cases."

During this fellowship year, she has conversed with 30 to 40 fellows working in various academic fields and worked on two books, with the hope of finishing one during the fellowship.

Then she will come to Buffalo. Sullivan is familiar with Western New York, having done her undergraduate work at Cornell University in Ithaca.

"There are a number of reasons why it is exciting to come to Buffalo," she said, citing the presence in

O'Brian Hall of other faculty with academic interests in law and religion, as well as the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. "Even in this age of the Internet, there's nothing like face to face. The proximity to Canada is very interesting as well, with all sorts of possibilities for cross-border conversations.

"This," she said, "is an unusual law school that is open to interdisciplinary conversation."



Professor Winnifred Fallers Sullivan.